

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4348

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 NICOSIA 2677

NODIS

FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN

REF: STATE 215513

SUMMARY AND COMMENT:

FRANGIEH EXPRESSED NEITHER ENTHUSIASM NOR DISSATISFACTION WITH OUR POSITION. HE AND CHAMOUN EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE ABOUT THEIR MILITARY AND POLITICAL PROSPECTS BUT BLAMED THE DIM OUTLOOK FOR A SETTLEMENT ON ALLEGED PALESTINIAN UNWILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE. WE DETECTED SOME SIGNS THAT THEY ARE BECOMING LESS CERTAIN ABOUT THE SYRIAN COMMITMENT. FRANGIEH DID NOT ASK FOR USG MILITARY AID, BUT CHAMOUN DID.

1. PRESIDENT FRANGIEH RECEIVED US AT HIS OFFICE/HOME IN KFOUR ON SEPTEMBER 2. FORMER PRESIDENT CHAMOUN, PARLIAMENTARY DEPUTY EDOUARD HONEIN, PRESIDENTIAL AID CARLOS KHOURY AND FONMIN SECRETARY GENERAL NAGIB DAHDAH ALSO ATTENDED. TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS I READ MY PRESENTATION FROM NOTES WE HAD PREPARED IN FRENCH TRANSLATED FROM THE DEPARTMENT'S TALKING POINTS. FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN LISTENED CAREFULLY, NOTES WERE TAKEN AND FRANGIEH LATER ASKED ME TO REPEAT THE PORTION DEALING

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WITH THE TWO POSSIBLE DANGERS WHICH WE SEE ARISING IN THE

ABSENCE OF A SETTLEMENT.

2. FRANGIEH EXPRESSED HIS SATISFACTION WITH WHAT I HAD TO SAY BUT OBSERVED THAT THE GOL SIMPLY HAD NOT RECEIVED THE HELP IT HAD EXPECTED. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WE HAD MADE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUITION IN ENCOURAGING THE SYRIANS TO PLAY A ROLE IN LEBANON. HE WONDERED WHY WE WERE REMAINING SILENT ABOUT OUR CONTACTS WITH SYRIA AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS, THEREBY GIVING THE LEBANESE PUBLIC THE IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE DOING NOTHING. TO MY RESPONSE THAT THE RESULT OF OUR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE IMPRESSION HELD BY THE LEBANESE PUBLIC, FRANGIEH RETORTED THAT THE SOVIETS ARE NOT SO MODEST ABOUT HIDING THE POSITIONS THEY HAVE TAKEN IN SUPPORT OF THEIR FRIENDS. I THEN EXPANDED SOMEWHAT ON THE WAYS IN WHICH US GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITIES CONDITION THE TYPE OF SUPPORT WHICH THE USG CAN PROVIDE, EMPHASIZING ONCE AGAIN OUR DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE USING DIPLOMATIC MEANS TO HELP LEBANESE REACH A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT.

3. WITH REFERENCE TO THE POSSIBILITY, WHICH WE HAD RAISED, OF AN ADVERSE SHIFT IN THE BALANCE OF ARAB ELEMENTS, FRANGIEH ASKED FOR MORE SPECIFICS. CAREFULLY STRESSING THAT WE DID NOT POSSESS SPECIFIC INDICATORS BUT THAT OUR ANALYSIS WAS ONE OF PRUDENCE AND CAUTION, I MENTIONED THAT THE SYRIAN POSITION IS IMPORTANT, THAT SOME ARAB COUNTRIES ARE PRESENTLY TAKING A RELATIVELY POSITIVE STANCE AND THAT THERE ARE FAVORABLE TRENDS AMONG THE RANKS OF LEBANESE MUSLIMS. FRANGIEH REPLIED THAT IF WE WERE WORRIED ABOUT A DETERIORATION OF THE PRESENT FAVORABLE BALANCE WE SHOULD HAVE A PROPOSAL TO AVOID THE DANGER. I ANSWERED THAT WE HAD NO SPECIFIC PROPOSAL BUT THAT WE WOULD SUPPORT A SETTLEMENT ALONG THE LINES OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS AND THE FEBRUARY BAABDA AGREEMENT. FRANGIEH SAID THAT HE ONLY ASKED THAT WE FIND A WAY TO IMPLEMENT THE TWO AGREEMENTS.

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FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

4. ON THE MILITARY SIDE, FRANGIEH UNDERSTOOD THAT WE WOULD NOT SUPPLY AID TO THE CHRISTIANS, AND HE MADE CLEAR THAT HE WAS NOT ASKING FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT. CHAMOUN BROKE IN TO DISAGREE. EXPLAINING THAT HE SPOKE ONLY FOR CAMILLE CHAMOUN, HE MAINTAINED THAT THE MARONITES CAN RE-IMPOSE UNITY ON LEBANON IF THEY RECEIVE MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND THAT THIS WAS HIS PREFERRED COURSE. "GIVE US THE TOOLS AND WE WILL FINISH THE JOB." EVEN IF WE FIRST PURSUED A POLITICAL SOLUTION, DECLARED CHAMOUN, WE MUST BE PREPARED TO PROVIDE THE MARONITES WITH MILITARY BACKING IN THE LIKELY EVENT THAT THE OTHER SIDE REJECTS A SETTLEMENT.

5. I ASKED WHERE THE NEGOTIATIONS STOOD. FRANGIEH STATED THAT THE GOL WAS NOT A PARTY TO THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE PHALANGE AND THE PALESTINIANS FOR A CEASE-FIRE ON THE METN. THE NATIONAL FRONT POSITION, HE SAID, IS TO ACCEPT A CEASE-FIRE ONLY IF IT IS A GENERAL ONE AND ONLY IF IT LEADS TO PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWLS. (IN ARABIC BYPLAY BETWEEN CHAMOUN AND FRANGIEH IT APPEARED THAT FRANGIEH WAS NOT FULLY CUT IN ON PHALANGIST NEGOTIATIONS, WHICH HE RATHER IRRITABLY DISMISSED AS MINOR.) FRANGIEH DESCRIBED THE MARONITE NEGOTIATING POSITION AS FOLLOWS: (A) WHERE THE PALESTINIANS AND THEIR ALLIES WITHDRAW FROM AREAS OF TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN HABITATION, THE SECURITY FORCES IN CONTROL SHOULD BE CHRISTIAN, ALTHOUGH ARAB LEAGUE
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OFFICERS COULD BE STATIONED AS OBSERVERS. (B) WHERE CHRISTIAN FORCES WITHDRAW FROM AREAS OF TRADITIONAL MUSLIM HABITATION, ARAB LEAGUE TROOPS SHOULD TAKE CONTROL. WHEN I ASKED WHAT CHANCE THEY SAW FOR OBTAINING PALESTINIAN ACCEPTANCE OF SUCH TERMS, THEY REPLIED THAT IT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED ALREADY IF THE OTHER SIDE WANTED A SETTLEMENT. CHAMOUN ADVANCE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS TO EXPLAIN WHY THE PALESTINIANS CONTINUE TO RESIST: (A) NEW OUTSIDE SUPPORT IN MEN AND MATERIEL, MOST RECENTLY THE ARRIVAL OF ALGERIAN TROOPS, AND (B) ENCOURAGEMENT BY IRAQ, LIBYA, THE SOVIET UNION AND, TO SOME EXTENT, EGYPT, TO KEEP ON FIGHTING. THE LACK OF PEACEFUL INTENT,

CLAIMED CHAMOUN, IS SHOWN MOST DRAMATICALLY BY THE CALL FOR GENERAL CONSCRIPTION. HE PERSONALLY DID NOT CONSIDER ANY OF THE PLO LEADERS TO BE MODERATES. CHAMOUN ADDED THAT THE SYRIANS ARE EQUALLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE CHANCES FOR A SOLUTION. FRANGIEH INTERRUPTED TO SAY THAT HE WAS A TRIFLE LESS PESSIMISTIC THAN CHAMOUN. THE MAIN SOURCE FOR HIS " SMIDGEON" OF OPTIMISM WAS THE EVENTS IN KUWAIT WHICH, HE HOPED, WAS A GISEN THAT OTHER ARAB STATES WOULD REDUCE THEIR SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIANS.

6. REGARDING THE TWO POSSIBLE DANGERS WE HAD DISCUSSED, FRANGIEH EXPRESSED AGREEMENT WITH THE FIST, SAYING THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION OF DE FACTO PARTITION WAS ALREADY RADICALIZING THE PALESTINIANS. CHAMOUN ADDED HIS VIEW THAT IF FIGHTING CONTINUED IT WOULD AT LEAST BE POSSIBLE TO SAVE ONE PART OF LEBANON FROM "GOING COMMUNIST.". AS FOR THE DANGER OF A CHANGE IN THE BALANCE OF ARAB ELEMENTS, FRANGIEH SAID THE KEY ELEMENT WAS THE SYRIAN POSITION. AS LONG AS THE ASAD REGIME EXISTS, FRANGIEH EXPECTED NO DIMINUTION OF SYRIAN SUPPORT. HE PRESSED US FOR AN EXPLANATION OF WHY THE USG WISHED TO DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO THE TWO DANGERS. DOES THE USG HAVE INFORMATION PREDICTING A MORE ACTIVE SOVIET INTERVENTION, HE ASKED? IF SO, PURSUED FRANGIEH, THE USG WOULD HAVE TO MOVE IN TO REDRESS THE BALANCE. IF THE CHRISTIANS COULD ONLY DEFEND THEIR AREA OF LEBANON, THEN THE USG WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSEQUENCES IN THE REST OF LEBANON AND THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST. I DECLINED TO BE DRAWN OUT ON SUCH HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS, SIMPLY
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NOTING THAT IT APPEARED TO US THAT NEGOTIATIONS NOW COULD AVERT THE POSSIBLE DANGERS OF THE FUTURE.

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4350

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FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

7. I ENDEAVORED TO CLOSE OUR CONVERSATION ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE BY REPEATING OUR READINESS TO AID IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE GOL AND THE ECONOMY ONCE THE FIGHTING HAD STOPPED. CHAMOUN'S ALL-TOO-PREDICTABLE RESPONSE WAS THAT IF WE ARE WILLING TO REEQUIPT THE LEBANESE NATIONAL FORCES WE SHOULD DO IT NOW RATHER THAN WHEN IT IS TOO LATE. AFTER FURTHER EXCHANGES ALONG THE LINES OF OUR FIRST MEETING, FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN REPEATED THEIR REQUEST THAT WE ESTABLISH A PERMANENT DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN JOUNIEH OR EAST BEIRUT. I RESPONDED THAT WE DID INTEND TO KEEP UP OUR CONTACTS WITH LEADERS IN THIS AREA BUT FELT THAT RESIDENT DIPLOMATS WERE NEITHER NEXESSARY NOR DESIRABLE.

8. AT LUNCHEON FOLLOWING THE MEETING, TWO OF THE LESSER PARTICIPANTS RAISED WITH MACK THE ISSUE OF THE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON. THEY CLEARLY HINTED THAT THEY DID NOT SHARE THE CONFIDENCE PROFESSED BY FRANGIEH. WE BELIEVE THAT THE INSISTENCE OF THE PRESIDENT ON THE COMMITMENT OF SYRIA IS BASED PROBABLY MORE UPON HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH ASAD THAN ANY SPECIFIC COMMITMENT TO HIM BY ASAD.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHRISTIANS, PERSONAL OPINION, PALESTINIANS, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, MEETING REPORTS, POLITICAL LEADERS, DISSIDENT FACTIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, CAT-C
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NICOSI02677
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: P840099-0157, N760006-0701
From: NICOSIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760988/aaaacxis.tel
Line Count: 257
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 76 STATE 215513
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <05 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING WITH FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, SY, US, (CHAMOUN, CAMILLE), (FRANGIEH, SULEIMAN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006